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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes the findings reported at the Intergovernmental Conference on Education and the Economy in a Changing Society, which was held in Paris, France in March, 1988. Provided is the text of the concluding remarks of John Dawkins, the Australian Minister for Employment, Education, and Training, who is also the Chairman of the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD). By way of introduction, Dawkins noted the common policy pressures member countries of the OECD face and shared concerns about the responses of educational systems to change. He then discussed 15 major conclusions of the conference, focusing on issues affecting the future of education and approaches that could help with rapid change by providing the kinds of higher education and vocational training that will be needed in the future. Directions for further work were Dawkins's next focus. He noted that individual nations differ in circumstances and must deal with issues differently, and that the OECD must accord the relationship between education and the economy a high priority. Thanks to the participants concluded the address. (SKC)

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Conclusions of the Chairman

The Hon. John Dawkins, MP
Australian Minister for Employment, Education and Training

18th March, 1988

INTRODUCTION

1. Firstly, I would like to make some brief comments on the significance of our Conference and the context in which its conclusions should be interpreted. I will then concentrate on the major conclusions we have reached, noting some of their implications for future action within Member countries and by the OECD itself.

2. This Conference has been significant for a number of reasons.

3. It is a clear expression, firstly, of the policy pressures currently facing all Member countries of the OECD: pressures for continuing structural adjustment and social change; pressures for micro-economic policy measures to complement traditional demand management policies; pressures for further improvements in productivity performance; and pressures associated with changes in demographic structure, technology and the organisation of work. For some of us the urgency of these pressures has been sharpened by changes in our competitive position in the international marketplace.

4. The Conference has been significant also for the substantial measure of convergence evident on a range of key issues. Most fundamentally, we share a common concern to ensure that our education systems are responsive to the demands of economic, technological and structural change, and indeed contribute to the process of change. At the same time we have noted the plurality of purposes served by the educational process, and the need for investment in education to be directed not only to better economic performance but also to improvements in social functioning and the quality of individual life. We recognise that failure in education and training -- in the form of dropout, low skills or poor retention -- represents a wasted investment and a cost to society.

5. Our Conference has been greatly strengthened by the active participation of employer and union representatives, as reflected in the

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positive statements contributed by both BIAC and TUAC. We have benefited greatly also from the excellent papers prepared by the Secretariat, whose analysis which was broadly supported by participants, has provided a strong foundation for our discussions.

6. I do not overlook the differences that have emerged in the course of our discussions -- differences of emphasis and degree, and even occasionally of viewpoint. Such differences are not surprising, reflecting as they do the significant variations in our national circumstances and institutional arrangements. On these grounds alone there is good reason for diversity in our particular policy measures and practical approaches to the implementation of change. It would be foolish, and futile, to seek total agreement on such matters.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

7. Against this background I turn now to the major conclusions reached over the past two days. For the reasons just stated, I present these as general conclusions only, rather than as specific recommendations to national governments.

8. We recognise firstly that education serves many important roles in our society, one of which is its contribution to the performance of our economies and labour markets. That contribution will itself be most effective when it is part of an overall strategy of economic, regional and enterprise restructuring and modernisation. Beyond this, education caters for a wide range of social, cultural and individual interests, which in turn need to be appropriately protected. We note the clear consensus from all three working groups, supported by the statements of TUAC and BIAC, on the need for a general educational foundation to be the basis of preparation for an active working life.

9. The rapid pace of economic and social change imposes pressures in all areas of national and community life. Effective responses to these pressures will require a continuing emphasis on the social sciences and humanities as important instruments in the process of adjustment.

10. There is substantial uncertainty about the precise speed and directions of change in the future. While strategic planning of education will be important, attempts at detailed forecasting of future skill requirements have proven notoriously unreliable in the past. What is needed, rather, are co-ordinated strategies within government, and actively involving other parties, which promote maximum flexibility and adaptability on the part of enterprises, education systems, labour markets and individual workers. These strategies should include such elements as joint assessments of trends in likely requirements for different skills, and the transmittal of such information to students through counselling and other means.

11. A key objective of such a flexible approach must be to impart to all young people a broad base of transferable skills, while taking into account the special needs of particular groups. We need also to explore new methods to promote the development of skills and attitudes which equip the workforce to adapt to and influence change. Consistent with broader social trends and

requirements, the skills in question include qualities such as the habit of learning, curiosity, creativity, initiative, team-work and personal responsibility.

12. An approach along these lines carries important implications for the practices and attitudes of employers. The private sector in particular must assume primary responsibility for the provision of training and retraining opportunities for adults. Moreover, such opportunities need to be extended to all members of the workforce, not merely to a select elite of higher-level managers and technical staff. Likewise, it is incumbent on industry to make the most effective possible use of the skills and attributes of workers, both by expanding job opportunities and by enriching the content of jobs through changes to work practices and organisation.

13. We discussed also the importance of defining the main elements of a broad and general education. A core curriculum imparting basic skills is one essential requirement. Within this, a range of particular emphasis as diverse as information technology, language training and attitudes and values will need to be incorporated, often on an interdisciplinary basis. Equally important is the ability of our education and training systems, both public and private, to deliver these new directions through adaptable processes and suitably qualified teachers and training providers.

14. Career education and counselling will play a vital role in enabling young people to identify their future work options; to appreciate the value of education and training in pursuing those options; and particularly in providing the basis for informed choices.

15. Our discussions have underlined the fact that no single model of education and training will have universal application across all countries or even within any particular country. A diversity of approaches is needed, tailored to the needs and abilities of particular groups of students. An essential complement to such diversity, however, is an articulated set of national arrangements for the assessment, certification and accreditation of skills. Such arrangements should give appropriate weight to experience gained in different settings -- whether formally in an educational institution or more informally within employment. In particular, also, they should enhance rather than restrict the transfer of academic and vocational credits, the portability of qualifications, and the mobility of workers in the labour market.

16. The productive use of advanced technology will require new forms of work organisation, more participative management, more autonomous and creative work styles and new forms of individual and group learning at the work place. Collective bargaining will play an important role in these developments. There will be a growing convergence, in both initial and further education, between those skills seen as vocationally relevant and those personal and social competences that emerge from general education.

17. We have noted the important contribution of our higher education institutions to economic and social development, particularly through the high quality of their general and professional courses and the extensive range of their basic and applied research activities. We have agreed also that these institutions should retain their autonomy. An important issue to be

addressed, however, is how government, industry and higher education institutions might interact to ensure that priority is given to national and regional economic and social objectives, including the improvement of the institutions' own efficiency and responsiveness.

18. Institutions of higher education cannot expect any major increase in public funding. They must become more entrepreneurial in outlook and increasingly self-sufficient in funding. New funding models which encourage institutions to bid competitively for new programme funds related to national and regional priorities would be one means of encouraging this.

19. There is a clear trend towards greater interdependence between the economies of different countries, as well as growing internationalisation of education and training systems themselves. In response to these trends, action should be taken within countries to give increased attention to the teaching of foreign languages, international exchanges of students and staff, and the internationalisation of research. There is also a useful role for comparative studies across countries of educational issues, developments and performance.

20. At all levels of the education and training system there will be a continuing need to manage resources better. Efficiency, effectiveness and enhanced productivity will continue to be important issues which managers and others in the system must address. It is recognised that many demands likely to be placed on the system will require additional resources, particularly where systems are expanding or there is a need for investment in innovation and quality enhancement. Individual countries will need to address the question of who should provide those additional resources, what priorities should be set, and how the costs might be shared amongst governments, individuals and the social partners.

21. An active involvement by all parties in the education and training process would assist in the development of training markets, in which many different styles and contents of training would be available to individual workers (eg., both in-company and outside the company; for the unemployed and small and medium enterprises, and so on). The role of governments and the public sector in such markets would be not only to participate in them as deliverers of training but also to play a co-ordinating and standard-setting role.

22. Finally, countries will differ in the manner in which responsibility for the provision of initial and further education is divided between the government and others. However, all countries need appropriate mechanisms to allow agreement to be reached on how responsibilities are to be divided. There can be no expectation that governments alone should bear these responsibilities.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

23. Across all the issues discussed at this Conference there have been some strong similarities between OECD Member countries, but also some significant differences. We differ, for example, in our particular sets of economic circumstances and in the mix and speed of the adjustments required. We differ

also in the balance between public and private sector efforts in education and training; in the mix between basic and applied research, and in the present balance between vocational and general education.

24. Accordingly, while the conclusions I have just outlined provide some useful guidance on policies to be followed by all Member countries, the details of policy approaches will necessarily differ between countries according to their particular sets of economic circumstances, social objectives and institutional arrangements. We have all, I think, gained much from our frank discussion of common issues and problems and a joint consideration of possible solutions.

25. Our Conference has also highlighted important directions for the future work of the OECD itself. Clearly, the relationship between education and the economy should continue to be accorded a high priority in its future programme of work, and specific issues to be addressed should include:

-- improvements in the data base for international comparisons of education and training;

-- international studies of participation in further education and training;

-- comparative studies of private sector investment in education and training;

-- arrangements for the assessment and certification of skills and competences in further education and training;

-- international studies of the educational attainment of the population and labour force;

-- the implications of developments in collective bargaining and wage fixation arrangements for further education and training;

-- the continued development (via CERI) of outcome indicators for education, as a basis for international comparisons and increased accountability;

-- the extension of current OECD studies on the funding of higher education to include an analysis of the impact of different funding options on the responsiveness of institutions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

26. In conclusion, I would like to thank on your behalf a number of people who have contributed substantially to the success of this Conference:

-- the Chairmen of our three working groups:
Mr. Robert Carneiro, Minister for Education, Portugal
Mr. Phil Goff, Minister for Employment and Associate Minister for Education, New Zealand; and
Mr. José Maravall, Minister for Education and Science, Spain;

-- other Ministers and heads of delegation and their colleagues;

-- business and trade union representatives, whose contributions have formed a vital part of the total debate;

-- and the Secretariat for their excellent discussion documents and assistance at our Conference: in particular Mr. Ron Gass, Mr. George Papadopoulos, Mr. Gregory Wurzburg and the interpreters.

27. May I thank you all for your contributions and support.